

2nd to 5th October 2018

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**EUSARF 2018 PORTO**

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## Mental Health Characteristics and Needs in Children and Adolescents in Residential Care

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Wednesday, 3rd October @ 16:15: Adversity and Needs of Children in Care (Venue: Porto)

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**Background:** Residential Care (RC) consists of the placement of a child in an institution which has permanent facilities, equipment and a staff that guarantees the appropriate care of his/her needs and provides conditions to allow for his/her education, well-being and development. Several studies have showed that the prevalence and severity of mental health problems are greater in children and adolescents in RC than in the general population. The risk factors for the problems observed are related, not only to previous family contexts, but also to individual characteristics and contextual variables. Furthermore, there is a significant number of clinical cases that are not timely diagnosed, leading to emotional and behavioural problems and being a risk factor for psychopathology in adult life.

**Objectives:** The main goals of this presentation is to analyse the frequency of Internalization Problems (IP), Externalizing Problems (EP) and Total Problems (TP) of adolescents in RC in Portugal; determine the degree of (dis)agreement between different informants regarding emotional and behavioural problems, and analyse gender differences for emotional and behavioural problems.

**Method:** 256 adolescents (56.6% male), aged 11 to 18 ( $M = 15.14$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) participated in this study. The information was collected through the questionnaires that compose the ASEBA Battery (CBCL; TRF; YSR) using caregivers, teachers and the adolescents as informants.

**Results:** The three informants classified a high percentage of adolescents as borderline or clinical cases for IP, EP and TP. This result shows the presence of psychological problems and maladaptive behaviours that indicate psychopathological symptomatology. Regarding the agreement between the informants, the highest correlations were found between the self-report and caregivers' assessment on the EP scales. Moreover, significant differences associated to gender were found, with girls showing more problems and psychological maladjustment in Anxiety/Depression, Somatic Complaints, IP and EP.

**Conclusions:** The findings of this study highlight the need for RC professionals to be adequately aware of the signs and symptoms of mental health problems in adolescents. RC centres should adopt evidence-based prevention programmes, require careful assessment of adolescents' needs, be culturally appropriate and integrate adolescents into psychosocial health policies. It is essential to implement measures to assess the quality of RC centres, provide specific training to caregivers in order to promote proper management of adolescents' behaviour, build more positive interactions and respect the Children's rights, thus enhancing well-being.